

## Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

### Spruce-Fir Moss Spider

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

It was quite balmy in Asheville on that particular late-May morning. While the weather may be warm and clear in town, it's no indication of conditions above 6000 feet, on the shoulders of Mount Mitchell, the highest peak east of the Mississippi River.

It's there, on the mountain-top islands of cool, moist climate, where you'll find the spruce-fir moss spider. The spiders are small, only about the size of a pencil eraser, and as their name implies, they live in the moss mats found beneath spruce-fir forests that only grow at high elevation.

We left Asheville, drove up a few thousand feet in elevation, parked and began hiking. The dry warmth of Asheville was long behind us as a heavy mist developed into a steady drip bordering on rain. Fleece and wool were donned, and a longing arose for warm gloves left in the closet.

We weren't here to find the spiders - ours was a data-collection mission. We were searching for tiny computers attached to trees throughout the spider's habitat. These data-loggers record temperature and humidity, every fifteen minutes, for months. We simply had to download the data for processing back at the office.

These data will give biologists a better idea of the conditions under which the spiders thrive and should prove to be especially helpful in providing a picture of how this habitat changes in response to climate change.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.